

# One Hundred Eighth Congress of the United States of America

## AT THE FIRST SESSION

*Begun and held at the City of Washington on Tuesday,  
the seventh day of January, two thousand and three*

### Concurrent Resolution

Whereas His Holiness, Pope John Paul II, was born Karol Jozef Wojtyla in Wadowice, Poland, on May 18, 1920, the youngest of 3 children, born to Karol Wojtyla and Emilia Kaczorowska;

Whereas Pope John Paul II personally suffered and experienced deprivation from an early age, losing his mother, eldest brother, and father before turning age 21;

Whereas Pope John Paul II found comfort and strength in the example of his father's faith, who he observed "after my mother's death, his life became one of constant prayer. Sometimes I would wake up during the night and find my father on his knees \* \* \* his example was in a way my first seminary";

Whereas Pope John Paul II was enrolled in Jagiellonian University in Cracow in 1939, which was closed by the Nazis during their occupation of Poland;

Whereas Pope John Paul II experienced the brutishness of a godless totalitarian regime, which sought to eradicate the history and culture of a proud people and sent many of his professors, friends, and millions of Polish Jews to camps where they were systematically murdered;

Whereas Pope John Paul II was himself arrested by Nazi occupation forces in 1942, but his life was spared because of his employment at a limestone quarry, work deemed essential to the war effort;

Whereas Pope John Paul II courageously defied the Nazi occupation forces, risking his own life to protect Polish Jews from persecution, helping to organize the underground "Rhapsodic Theatre", which he intended to be "a theatre \* \* \* where the national spirit will burn", writing two religious plays considered subversive to the Nazi regime, and enrolling in the clandestine seminary of Archbishop Sapieha of Cracow, where he studied religion, theology, and philosophy;

Whereas the Nazi occupation of Poland was ended only by the imposition of a communist era of occupation that sought to subjugate Polish citizens, extinguish Polish nationalism, and subjected the exercise of individual religious liberty to the control of godless Stalinist rulers;

Whereas Pope John Paul II was ordained in 1946, later becoming a Professor of Ethics and Chaplain at the Catholic University of Lublin, the only Catholic university behind the Iron Curtain, where he, again at great personal risk, initiated activities that

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helped to preserve the intellectual, cultural, and historical richness of his homeland and protected the integrity and independence of the Catholic Church in Poland;

Whereas Pope John Paul II was an articulate and outspoken advocate for religious freedom and Christian humanism at Vatican Council II, asserting that the Church could not claim religious liberty for itself unless it was willing to concede it to others;

Whereas Pope John Paul II, upon returning to his homeland, frequently cited the Council's declaration that religious freedom was "the first of human rights", a phrase embraced by Polish Catholics in their struggle against the hegemony of the communist regime;

Whereas Pope John Paul II, on October 16, 1978, was elected the 264th Pope, making history by becoming the first-ever Slavic Pope and the first non-Italian Pope in more than 400 years;

Whereas October 22, 2003, marked the Silver Jubilee of His Holiness' inauguration of his ministry as Bishop of Rome and Supreme Pastor of the Catholic Church, signifying Pope John Paul II's completion of 25 years as the spiritual leader of more than 1,000,000,000 Catholic Christians around the world, including more than 66,000,000 Catholic Christians in the United States;

Whereas Pope John Paul II was a unique, substantial, and historic catalyst in the demise of Soviet communism and the emancipation of hundreds of millions of people from totalitarian rule;

Whereas Pope John Paul II, in his inaugural sermon, boldly offered hope to oppressed peoples around the world while causing authoritarian rulers to brace by proclaiming "open the boundaries of states, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilization and development. Do not be afraid.";

Whereas Pope John Paul II returned to his native Poland for 9 days in June 1979, unleashing patriotic and religious forces that would ultimately lead to the peaceful toppling of the communist regime in Poland and the dramatic demise of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union;

Whereas Pope John Paul II, before visiting his native Poland in 1987, met with President Ronald Reagan, who recognized the fruits of His Holiness' labors by stating "be assured that the hearts of the American people are with you. Our prayers will go with you in profound hope that the terrible burden of brave people everywhere who yearn for freedom, even as all men and women yearn for the freedom that God gave us all. \* \* \* We see the power of the spiritual force in that troubled land, uniting a people in hope, just as we see the powerful stirrings in the East of a belief that will not die despite generations of oppression. \* \* \* For despite all the attempts to extinguish it, the people's faith burns with a passionate heat: once allowed to breathe free, that faith will burn so brightly it will light the world.";

Whereas Pope John Paul II was recognized by Lady Margaret Thatcher to have "provided the main impetus for the revival of Solidarity and the pressure for reform [in his native Poland]";

Whereas Pope John Paul II was acknowledged by Mikhail Gorbachev to have played an essential role in the liberation of those who lived under European communism when he stated

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“everything that happened in Eastern Europe \* \* \* would have been impossible without this pope”;

Whereas Pope John Paul II carried on an active correspondence with world leaders during the 1980’s, involving the Church in efforts to promote peace by reducing tensions, and exerting his moral authority to persuade the superpowers to engage in a “dialogue” that succeeded in reducing conventional and nuclear weapons and helped to avert a nuclear war;

Whereas Pope John Paul II has used public and private diplomacy and the power of moral suasion to encourage world leaders to respect the inalienable rights of the human person;

Whereas Pope John Paul II, on May 13, 1981, was shot by a would-be assassin, and nevertheless provided a remarkable example of the power of grace, later visiting his attacker in prison, and stating afterwards “I spoke to him as I would speak to a brother whom I have forgiven and who enjoys my confidence”;

Whereas Pope John Paul II has ministered to Catholic and non-Catholic alike, providing a personal example of grace, endurance, compassion, courage, sacrifice, and foresight;

Whereas Pope John Paul II has sought to heal divisions between the Catholic Church and other Christian faiths, the Jewish faith, and Islam, expressing sadness and regret for the individual acts of present and former Catholics who persecuted members of other faiths, and promoting reconciliation and dialogue through the first-ever Papal visits to synagogues and mosques, as well as visits to areas of historic conflict, including Ireland and the Holy Land;

Whereas Pope John Paul II visited Cuba to speak directly to the Cuban people and their communist rulers in 1998, calling for political and religious freedom, the release of political prisoners, a recognition of the right to express one’s faith “in the context of public life”, and the importance of fundamental human dignities, including that “each person enjoying freedom of expression, being free to undertake initiatives and make proposals within civil society, and enjoying appropriate freedom of association” is a necessity;

Whereas Pope John Paul II has traveled farther than any other Pope in history, traversing nearly three quarters of a million miles, visiting more than 125 countries, including African nations never before visited by a Pope, being seen by more people than anyone in human history, and evangelizing to more than 6,000,000 people in the closing mass of World Youth Day ’95 in the Philippines;

Whereas Pope John Paul II has changed the course of history, leading the Catholic Church through a dramatic and remarkable period, and into Christianity’s third millennium;

Whereas Pope John Paul II has devoted his life to the amelioration of the human cost of terror and oppression through his dedication to truth, forgiveness, and the development of a vibrant public moral culture;

Whereas Pope John Paul II has articulated the importance of individual liberty being undergirded by a “moral order”, has embraced the poor and oppressed masses of the world, and encouraged

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governments and the faithful to attend to the needs of those who are less fortunate;

Whereas Pope John Paul II has brought hope and inspiration to hundreds of millions of people around the world oppressed by tyranny, hunger, disease, and despair;

Whereas Pope John Paul II has worked tirelessly to bring peace to regions of the world that have been driven by strife, intolerance, hatred, and violence for far too long; and

Whereas the Presidential Medal of Freedom is considered the highest civilian award of the United States Government: Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring),* That the Congress urges the President, on behalf of the United States, to present the Presidential Medal of Freedom to His Holiness, Pope John Paul II, in recognition of his significant, enduring, and historic contributions to the causes of freedom, human dignity, and peace and to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of His Holiness' inauguration of his ministry as Bishop of Rome and Supreme Pastor of the Catholic Church.

Attest:

*Clerk of the House of Representatives.*

Attest:

*Secretary of the Senate.*